

Hazardous Substances – **General**

08.01.08

Assessment of risk to health from working with hazardous substances >

This is one of a series of information bulletins, which have been written to assist the employer to manage risks associated with hazardous substances. The bulletins make up a package, which reflects the Australian Safety and Compensation Council's ([ASCC](#)) approach to managing workplace hazardous substances, which is currently being adopted throughout Australia.

Why is assessment needed?

The purpose of assessment is to determine whether a person's health is at risk from exposure to hazardous substances used or produced in the workplace. If there is a risk, information from the assessment can be used to select appropriate control measures to reduce the risk.

Who is responsible for assessment?

The employer has the legal responsibility to ensure that a suitable and sufficient assessment is made of the risks to health arising from work involving the use of hazardous substances.

Employers might do the assessment themselves or they may delegate the task to another competent person in the organisation. External people may be used, however where possible assessments should be done in-house.

What is assessed?

A practical approach to assessments is to divide up the workplace, work processes, or jobs so as to identify the work to be assessed

Basic steps to assessing health risks***Step One - identify the hazardous substances***

The first step is to identify all of the hazardous substances used or produced in the work area or process. Refer to the NT WorkSafe information bulletin [08.01.01](#) Hazardous Substances – What are they?

To identify hazardous substances:

- check the label for signal words such as warning, poison, hazardous, etc, and risk phrases that indicate the type of health hazard;

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- check if there is a Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) from the supplier and read the section on health hazards for the health effects;
- check the ASCC [Hazardous Substances Information System \(HSIS\)](#) produced at the workplace.
- a **Hazardous Substances Register** should be prepared that lists all the hazardous substances that are used or produced in any work at the workplace.

Step Two – review information about the hazardous substances

The second step in assessment is to obtain information about each hazardous substance used or produced in the work/task being assessed.

The primary source of information is the MSDS, which will provide information on the health effects of the substance if it is inhaled, swallowed or if there is contact with the skin or eyes. Information on the precautions for safe use is also given in the MSDS. Labels are another good source of health hazard and safety information.

If there is no MSDS (eg for by-products or emissions), information can be obtained from a number of sources.

For consumer packages (holding less than 30 kg or 30 litres) which are not opened on site, the product label will provide information about emergency procedures and first aid. This is useful for dealing with spills and fire emergencies.

Step Three - identify any risk of exposure

This step involves inspecting the work to find out whether people might be exposed to the hazardous substances by inhalation of airborne contaminants, or by ingestion or absorption through the skin or eyes.

The inspection should look at the effectiveness of existing control measures and if they are being used and maintained correctly. Control measures may need reviewing.

Generis assessments

If one or more hazardous substances are used or produced over similar work situations, a single assessment may be done and applied to all of those work situations.

If there is still uncertainty about the risk to health following an assessment, NT WorkSafe officers may be able to assist you.

ASCC has developed a [Guidance Note for the Assessment of Health Risks Arising from the Use of Hazardous Substances in the Workplace \[NOHSC:3017\(1994\)\]](#)

Record of assessment

Following the assessment for each hazardous substance or work process a record should be kept. This record could be kept in the **Hazardous Substance Register**. This indicates that an assessment has been done.

Review of assessment

An assessment review should take place:

- every five years (regardless even if there have been not been any changes to the work processes);

- whenever there is significant change to the work process;
- if new information becomes available about a hazardous substance in use at work;
- if adverse health effects are reported or detected in health surveillance; or
- if environmental monitoring shows inadequate control of exposure or improved.

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